

#19

Joint Judiciary Committee Meeting, September 26, 2013  
re: House Bills #4806 thru 4809

I wish to thank all of you for the opportunity to speak on the important bills under discussion today.

The reason I became involved in the bills being discussed today is 26 years ago my son, Karl, at the age of 16, killed his father. His sentence is life without chance of parole. That his crime was horrible and his punishment should be severe is not in question, however, I feel life without parole is not a humane answer for his punishment.

I was with Karl daily for the first 16 years of his life, he is now 43. I can say with absolutely certainty, Karl is not the same person who was incarcerated 26 years ago. I have watched him mature, carrying his education to a degree I never thought possible. He is constantly striving to better himself. While incarcerated, Karl completed his high school education, achieved satisfactory completion in many classes and programs, and consistently held a job. He has a friend who maintains a website with writings from Karl sharing his experiences and the learning process he is using to turn his life around ([sixteenandlife.com](http://sixteenandlife.com)). He does this in hopes of helping other troubled youth.

At this time Karl is incarcerated in Muskegon, participating in a four-year pilot seminary based program. In the entire state system, only 32 prisoners were selected. It is titled The Urban Ministry Institute and is sponsored by Prison Fellowship.

To be honest, I thought Karl was the only person incarcerated who had achieved so much. During past Judiciary hearings I have found out how wrong I was. There are other youthful offenders serving life sentences who have also accomplished a great deal during their incarceration.

I am not advocating that all youthful offenders be released from prison, not all have matured sufficiently to earn this right. But, there are those who have, through their actions and accomplishments, earned the chance to reenter society and become productive members of a community. That is what these bills will do, give youthful offenders a chance of parole. These bills will not automatically release prisoners. The parole board has the final decision.

In closing, I urge you to consider the lives of these young people who have grown up in prison. Some have managed to use their time productively, becoming mature, responsible, rehabilitated people in spite of youthful errors in judgment. These people do deserve a second chance at life. It is within your power to give this chance.

Again, thank you for your time. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or wish further discussion.

Betty Strunk  
PO Box 142  
LeRoy, MI 49655  
231-768-4758  
[bjperstr@yahoo.com](mailto:bjperstr@yahoo.com)

August 27, 2013.

To: House Criminal Justice and Senate Judicial committee.

Regarding: Michigan's juvenile lifer law and proposed House bills. 4806 and 4809

I am writing in support of the need to change legislation that has incarcerated youth under 17 years of age without chance of parole. The Supreme Court on June of 2012 decided, 5-4 it to be "unconstitutional and a form of cruel and unusual punishment that fails to acknowledge the potential for character and cognitive development in young people".. This is also considered a human rights violation across the world. Yet, in Michigan it is still legal.

I am an educator and founder and director for over 30 years of a non-profit retreat and and spiritual life center called MorningStar Adventures near LeRoy Mi. I have been personally involved a number of years with seeking justice on the issue of having a second chance for youthful offenders from my experience of being in communication with Karl Strunk, through, his initiation in 2005, as a youthful offender in for life for killing his father. I had met Karl through his mother Betty Strunk when he was a young teenager and recognized his creative abilities. The abuse Karl experienced with older teens had thrown his psyche into turmoil at a young age in attempting to hide his guilt, shame and fear around what had happened to him when he chose *not* to experience violence with bullying teens. This experience challenged him in ways he did not know how to cope with, making it difficult for him to reach out for the help he needed to come to terms with what had happened to him as a victim that set his chaos and confusion into motion.

Through my correspondence and experience with Karl over the past 8 years I have witnessed not only him grieving his crime over of 26 years ago, but struggling with what he had done and being determined to turn his life around because of it. He made a choice to pursue his creative genius by bringing goodness out of the destruction and for his own wellbeing as well as for those he has reached out to, in prison and outside. Karl is a testament to the fact that young, confused, mis-directed males can, indeed, grow up and be contributors to society, largely because of the pain and remorse they are willing to consciously suffer over their crimes and lost choice for outer freedom, especially if supported to do so.

In considering the legislation around putting children away for life without parole and the legislation to determine the parameters of this legislation, please take into consideration persons, such as Karl Strunk, who have become an asset to society through their choice to rehabilitate their lives and who deserve to have a chance to bring their wisdom to others in a very violent and bullying culture. To keep them incarcerated without the chance of proving their readiness for freedom, or at least for a reduced sentence after so many years of incarceration, is to participate in and perpetuate the culture of violence, as I see it. People like Karl teach the rest of us how to make the most our lives for goodness sake, no matter what our life circumstance is.

Our Justice system needs to stop perpetuating, with our tax dollars, the cost of unnecessary years of incarceration in an already over-loaded and non-reforming prison system, especially for those, like Karl, who have something of value to bring back to life with another chance. It is a tragic error to do otherwise. Thank you for considering my comments.

Sincerely,

Julie Keefer, 20564 MorningStar Trail, LeRoy MI [juliekeefer13@gmail.com](mailto:juliekeefer13@gmail.com)